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THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY IN EAST EUROPEAN PROPAGANDA

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SUMMARY

Soviet and East European propagandists were virtually unanimous in their assessment of the motivating factors behind President Kennedy's assassination.

Communist propagandists quickly accused right-wing extremists of plotting or abetting the Dallas murders.

They summarily rejected claims of Communist involvement in the assassination.

They asserted that President Kennedy's civil rights stand and his negotiations with the Soviet Union were primarily responsible for his murder by conspiratorial forces which hope to reverse the detente spirit in America.

Soviet propagandists, in particular, worked hard to expose purported American shortcomings which lead to political murder, and foremost among them the existence of uncurbed right-wing sentiment. Western democracy's weakness, they argued, is that it "generally countenances and virtually encourages fascist elements who afterward turn against it." Even the famed American system of justice, they charged, was revealed as a "travesty" by the events in Dallas.

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THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY IN EAST EUROPEAN PROPAGANDA

President John F. Kennedy was a victim of right-wing terrorists who hope to establish an "ultra-conservative dictatorship" in America and to reverse completely the peaceful trend in East-West relations. Such has been the main thrust of Soviet and East European comment and analysis on the recent events in Dallas.

In its broader applications, Soviet propaganda in particular blamed the slaying on the crumbling moral fabric of American democracy -- a system which, it charged, "countenances and virtually encourages fascist elements." Hence the assassination is frequently viewed as one with the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi, the fatal church bombing in Birmingham, the acts of defiance against federal authority in many areas, and similar "extremist outrages."

Soviet Union

The Soviet propaganda version of President Kennedy's assassination emerges from voluminous attention to the Dallas events and their aftermath. In the process, Moscow dissected America, its political life, and its complex human fabric. In general, Soviet propagandists portray a sick American society beset by the cancerous growth of right-wing political extremism.

Summing up the Soviet position on the assassination, the weekly New Times has stressed that the murder sprang from an ultra-rightwing plot; that the plotters sought political influence through the assassination in order to carry out their anti-Soviet, anti-peace policies; and that the Soviets hope that the American people will have seen "how heavy is the price of giving fascist elements a free hand."

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Moscow media constantly insist that the murder was plotted and carried out with the collusion of extremist groups which abound in the U.S. Soviet propaganda has never identified any specific groups or organizations as the "real" plotters, but has used insinuation and innuendo to weave a "web of guilt" tightly around those American forces which Moscow has consistently accused also in the past of hating everything that is "progressive" and that might bring peace nearer.

Much of what Moscow has to say about the "conspiracy" and assassination is aimed at domestic audiences. Europeans and Latin Americans are another favorite radio target. Soviet readers and listeners receive full doses of "exposes" about American right-wing movements, as well as sensational photos and shrill suggestive headlines: "Racism, Anti-Communism, War Hysteria -- Fertile Soil for Crime"; "Democracy is a Lying Phrase"; or, "The Rule of Capital Leans on the Geography of Terror."

Moscow foreign output attempted occasionally to bring the assassination closer to home through historic comparisons of extremism or political murder in a given target country. Soviet propaganda also relied extensively on foreign sources which either echo Soviet arguments or at least show that others too have grave doubts about the causes for the Dallas events and about the subsequent handling of the affair.

Soviet propagandists have attached particular significance to the fact that the murder was committed in Texas, the center of "American neo-fascism" and a "stronghold of the arrant reactionaries." The plot, they claim, was abetted by the John Birch Society, the "Goldwater group," and "henchmen of would-be dictator General Edwin Walker." And their support comes from the Texas oil millionaires, "America's ignorant, illiterate parvenus" who "readily finance any fascist organization", "the rich white supremacist Southern planters and armament monopolies, interested in an aggressive foreign policy, in the cold war, in colonial exploitation, and in preparations for aggression against Cuba."

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It is in the nature of democracy itself, Moscow contends, to permit the use of political extremism. "Bourgeois democracy generally countenances and virtually encourages fascist elements which afterward turn against it," it claims. Is it not "strange," the Soviet propagandist argue, that even after the experience of World War II "racialist tirades, eulogies of Hitler, and denunciations of the 'liberals in the White House' still fill the American air."

Taking advantage of Soviet Constitution day, Izvestiya and Literaturnaya Gazeta pursued the relationship between the assassination and American democracy further. Izvestiya scoffed at such an example of a free society and resolutely rejected a democracy in which "ultras" and racists shoot their presidents. Literaturnaya Gazeta argued that American extremists, these "accomplices in Kennedy's murder," hope to do away with the Constitution and bourgeois democracy, and to replace them with a "dictatorship of strongmen."

Moscow notes especially that about '2,000' rightist organizations exist in the U. S. and that last year a coordinating committee was set up to centralize their activities. Silver Shirts and other "semi-military fascist-racist organizations" are said to be taught how to shoot, and Moscow unequivocally brands as "gangs of political bandits" such other organizations as the White Citizens Councils, the National States Rights Party, the National Renaissance Party, and the Minutemen.

In characterizing the policies of the extremists, Moscow stated that the "rampant Right has no positive program, foreign or domestic. Its 'line' is to attack peaceful coexistence, to abuse the Soviet Union and all the socialist countries, to urge being 'tough' with communism." Of particular concern to the reactionary groups, it said, was Kennedy's stand on civil rights which "infuriated the diehards." The "ultras" were also said to be aroused by the signing of the test-ban treaty and by a continuing move toward a detente which they considered "grovelling before the communists," and "betraying America." This was compounded by Kennedy's "pro-peace utterances" and his pledge not to invade Cuba.

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Moscow hoped that "this time the political gangsters miscalculated," that America is "so horrified and outraged that it may compel whose duty it is to really clear up the affair."

The Soviet treatment of the assassination and its possible political implications is consonant with recent Moscow pronouncements on U.S. -Soviet relations and on international problems in general. It conforms to the general Soviet effort to expose American right-wing tactics. And it emphasizes the comparatively favorable Soviet response to President Kennedy and his policies which has characterized Moscow propaganda since the President's June speech at American University. In this respect, the Soviet Union has continued to project its thesis of "hawks" and "doves" in American politics. Cuba, Berlin, and South Vietnam have been attributed to pressure from the right wing, particularly in the Pentagon and in Congress, while the "positive" Kennedy policies were said to be the result of a "realistic appraisal" of the international situation by the late President.

Soviet concern over the future course of American foreign policy has been reflected in Soviet propaganda, which makes clear that it sees the influence of the radical Right as a definite threat to U.S. -Soviet relations and to a possible general detente with the West. While Moscow waits to see how President Johnson will conduct his foreign policy, its propaganda line emphasizes the particular threat of the Right, refraining from any general attack on the American way of life, but casting doubts on the U.S. form of democracy. Perhaps most significantly, Moscow does not now suggest that the possibilities for a genuine East-West detente have died with President Kennedy.

Eastern Europe

By and large, the Satellites' propaganda version has followed that of Moscow. After reporting the facts of the assassination as they emerged, the East European media immediately expanded on the theme of alleged rightist involvement in the murder. As soon as Oswald's Communist involvements became known, they engaged

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in defensive attacks against what they termed an "anti-Communist provocation" staged to prepare the ground for a wave of "extremist racist, fascist, anti-peace" reaction in the United States. In various instances consistency was put aside when some of the media hastily and almost simultaneously tried to promote the notions that (a) Oswald did not kill the President, (b) Oswald acted as an instrument of a rightwing reactionary racist plot in killing the President, and (c) Oswald could not have been a Communist because a Communist would not commit such a terrorist act.

Most Satellite commentators failed to dwell, as their Soviet colleagues did, on the concept that the events have shown up the American bourgeois democratic system as a breeding ground of rightist political extremism, and its moral fabric as one of turpitude, torpor, and decay, although some did make occasional references to this effect. Thus, a Czechoslovak commentator remarked that the slayings were difficult to relate to "a civilized nation that has claims to culture and calls itself a democracy." And a Bulgarian radio commentator expressed doubts about whether American democracy can withstand the pressures of rightwing reaction. But all of the Satellites gave wide coverage to and commented extensively on all those aspects of the two murders that underscored the themes of "lawlessness" and of "incredible methods" in the investigative and judicial, as well as in the security, features of the episodes.

In one known instance, the Hungarian Party organ pointed out that "we are witnessing here the stupendous machination of common gangsterism," thus combining the image of America as a country penetrated by "race haters, warmongers, and partisans of cold war" with that of a country where gangsterism is common.

Albania -- by now a Chinese rather than a Soviet Satellite -- has been the only East European Communist country which, so far, has refrained from going into the details of the President's assassination. Its position has been that nothing has changed as far as "aggressive, warmongering U.S. imperialism" is concerned.

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Yugoslavia

The Yugoslav press, radio and TV gave the fullest possible coverage to the Dallas tragedy. All facts connected with the President's assassination, Oswald's arrest, his background and subsequent killing by Ruby were reported. Throughout the Yugoslavs were noticeably disturbed by the possibility that Oswald's reported Marxist background and his connection with the Cuba Fair Play Committee might lead to serious complications in U. S. - Soviet relations, and that this in turn might affect Yugoslavia's present standing with the West. In this context Yugoslav sources were almost unanimous in presenting President Kennedy's assassination as a rightist plot. This treatment was intensified after Oswald's death. In playing up the danger of rightwing extremism, the press insinuated that there was an analogy between Oswald's act and the Reichstag fire.

After President Johnson's address to the Congress the suspicious attitude of the Yugoslav press moderated. The reports on the circumstances of the murder became more factual and the President's order for a complete FBI investigation of the assassination was received with confidence. Speaking of this order, Belgrade's largest daily Politika stated that "the genuine truth about the murder of John Kennedy" will emerge from these investigations.

As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, in Yugoslavia the murder of President Kennedy was used as a peg to attack American lawlessness and to raise questions about the American political mentality and the origins of the deep hatred which, according to Yugoslav press, was a force behind the assassin's trigger. In this connection, Yugoslav press recalled the murder of Medgar Evers, the bombing of Birmingham churches, the killing of foreign newsmen, the assault on the Federal marshalls, the attack on Adlai Stevenson, as well as reporting that Dallas school children had allegedly hailed the killing of President Kennedy. Most of such comments were taken from the American press. Their general tone was sober. In contrast to some Satellite comment, the Yugoslav press did not dwell on fascism in America and did not name any specific American rightist leaders or organizations as accomplices.

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